



News Release

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Contacts: [Donn Moyer](#), Communications Office

360-236-4076

Measles led to death of Clallam Co. woman; first in US in a dozen years

Tragic outcome for immunocompromised patient shows need for community protection

OLYMPIA — The death of a Clallam County woman this spring was due to an undetected measles infection that was discovered at autopsy.

The woman was most likely exposed to measles at a local medical facility during a recent outbreak in Clallam County. She was there at the same time as a person who later developed a rash and was contagious for measles. The woman had several other health conditions and was on medications that contributed to a suppressed immune system. She didn't have some of the common symptoms of measles such as a rash, so the infection wasn't discovered until after her death. The cause of death was pneumonia due to measles.

This tragic situation illustrates the importance of immunizing as many people as possible to provide a high level of community protection against measles. People with compromised immune systems often cannot be vaccinated against measles. Even when vaccinated, they may not have a good immune response when exposed to disease; they may be especially vulnerable to disease outbreaks. Public health officials recommend that everyone who is eligible for the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine get vaccinated so they can help protect themselves, their families, and the vulnerable people in their community.

Measles is highly contagious even before the rash starts, and is easily spread when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. If you're not protected, you can get measles just by walking into a room where someone with the disease has been in the past couple of hours.

Children should be vaccinated with two doses of MMR vaccine, with the first dose between 12 and 15 months and the second at four-to-six years. Adults born after 1956 should have at least one measles vaccination; some people need two. The state Department of Health immunization program [has online information about measles and measles vaccine](#).

The measles diagnosis for the Clallam County woman brings the state's case count to 11, and is the sixth in Clallam County for the year. The last active case of measles in Washington this year was reported in late April. Within about three weeks of exposure to someone with measles, it's possible to develop the disease. Since more than three weeks has already passed since the last active measles case, no one who had contact with one of the known cases is any longer at risk for developing measles from those exposures.

The last confirmed measles death in the United States was reported in 2003. More information about measles nationwide is available on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#).

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